

ABLAZE

1

JEAN-DAVID
MORVAN
PIERRE
ALARY

O CIMÉRIO

A RAINHA DA COSTA NEGRA



SQ
SQUADRON
YUGIFAN

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ABLAZE APRESENTA

O CIMÉRIO A RAINHA DA COSTA NEGRA

O Conan de Robert E. Howard surgiu pela primeira vez nas páginas da Pulp Magazine na década de 1930. Ele contribuiu com 17 histórias de Conan para a *Weird Tales Magazine* de 1932 a 1936. Através dessas histórias, vemos o herói selvagem de Robert E. Howard tomar forma.

Em "*A Rainha da Costa Negra*", Conan é perseguido por matar um juiz e encontra refúgio em um navio mercante... mas logo após zarpar, o Cimério e seus novos companheiros enfrentam uma ameaça: a lendária Bêlit a auto-proclamada **Rainha da Costa Negra**! Publicado pela primeira vez na *Weird Tales Magazine* na edição de maio de 1934, este clássico de Conan é um maravilhoso ponto de início.

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ROTEIRO ADAPTADO
JEAN-DAVID MORVAN
ADAPTAÇÃO COM BASE NA OBRA
DE ROBERT E. HOWARD

ARTE DO INTERIOR
PIERRE ALARY

CORES
SEDYAS

LETRAS
DEZI SIENTY

ARTE DA CAPA
JASON METCALF,
MIRKA ANDOLFO,
ED BENES,
PIERRE ALARY

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RICH YOUNG & PATRICE LOUINET
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PATRICE LOUINET

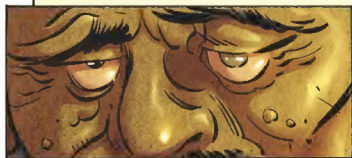
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EU PASSEI UMA QUANTIDADE CONSIDERÁVEL DE TEMPO ENTRE VOCÊS, PESSOAS CIVILIZADAS. NO ENTANTO, SUAS MANEIRAS AINDA SÃO PERFEITAMENTE ESTRANHAS PARA MIM.

EU ESTAVA EM ARGOS HÁ APENAS UMA SEMANA, PROCURANDO SERVIÇO. COM A ESCASSEZ DAS GUERRAS, ESTÁ DIFÍCIL PARA UM MERCENÁRIO SE MANTER EMPREGADO.

ONTEM À NOITE, EM UMA TAVERNA, UM CAPITÃO DA GUARDA REAL SE ENGRAÇOU COM A GAROTA DE UM DOS MEUS JOVENS AMIGOS MERCENÁRIOS. ELE NATURALMENTE O ESPALHOU, MAS PARECE QUE HÁ UMA MALDITA LEI CONTRA MATAR GUARDAS. ENTÃO O RAFAZ E A GAROTA FUGIRAM.

UM RUMOR SE ESPALHOU DE QUE ELE FAZIA PARTE DE MINHA COMPANHIA. ENTÃO FUI ARRASTADO PARA O TRIBUNAL ESTA MANHÃ.

UM JUIZ ME PERGUNTOU ONDE O MERCENÁRIO ESTAVA ESCONDIDO. EU RESPONDI QUE, DESDE QUE ELE ERA UM AMIGO, EU NUNCA O TRAIRIA. EM VEZ DE ACHAR MINHA ATITUDE ADMIRÁVEL, O JUIZ FICOU IRRITADO E FEZ UM GRANDE DISCURSO SOBRE MEU DEVER PARA COM O ESTADO, A SOCIEDADE E OUTRAS COISAS SOBRE AS QUAIS NÃO ENTENDIA NADA.

QUANTO MAIS ELE FALAVA, MAIS ELE GRITAVA... EU EXPLICAVA CLARAMENTE A MINHA POSIÇÃO PARA O LUNÁTICO E ELE FINGIA QUE NÃO ENTENDIA. ISSO ME DEIXOU FURIOSO...





ENTÃO EU PEGUEI
MINHA ESPADA E CORTEI
A CABEÇA DESTES
JUIZ FURIOSO.



DEPOIS TRACI UM CAMINHO
SANGRENTO PARA FORA
DO TRIBUNAL ATÉ CHEGAR
A SAÍDA.



CONSEGUI ESCAPAR
ROUBANDO O PURO
SANGUE DO GOVER-
NADOR.



ENTREGUE AS ARMAS
OU VOCÊ É UM HOMEM
MORTO!

EU NUNCA TIVE
MEDO DE MORRER.

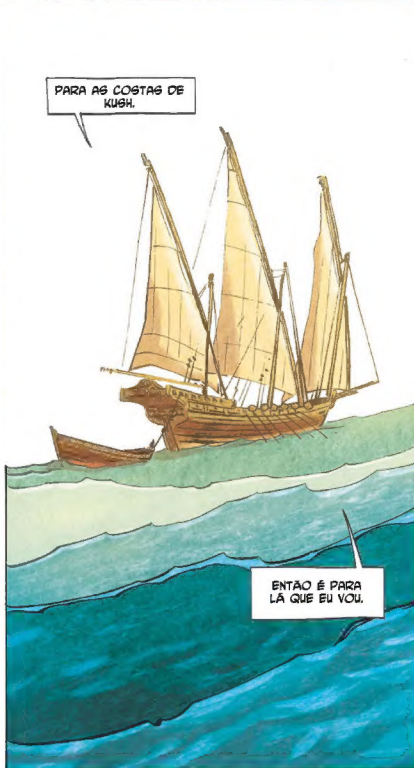
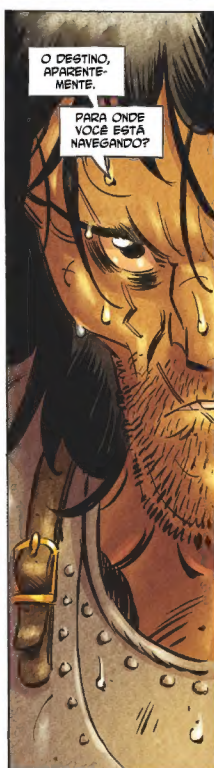


MAS "ENTREGUE AS ARMAS"...

ESSA EXPRESSÃO
NEM EXISTE NO
CIMÉRIO!









NINGUÉM VIAJA DE GRAÇA NO ARGOS.

EU NÃO TENHO COBRE... MAS EU PAGO COM O MEU AÇO.



ELA JÁ ATRAVESSOU O DESTINO DE ALGUNS PIRATAS PROMISSORES.



AS COSTAS NÃO SÃO SEGURAS, DEVO RECONHECER. ENTÃO ACEITO SUA OFERTA.

NÃO FOI UMA OFERTA.



MEU NOME É TITO, MARINHEIRO-MESTRE LICENCIADO DOS PORTOS DE ARGOS.

E VOCÊ?



EU SOU CONAN, UM CIMÉRIO.

EU TIVE TANTAS TÍTULOS E EMPREGADORES QUE NÃO ME LEMBRO DE TODOS ELES.

HÁ ATÉ UM BOATO DE QUE EU ERA REI. SE 1660 É VERDADE, EU ESQUECI.

EU PROVAVELMENTE ESTAVA BÉBADO DEMAIS.



EU GOSTO DE VOCÊ, CONAN.

DESCULPE, MARINHEIRO, MAS VOCÊ NÃO É MEU TIPO.



NÃO É 1660 QUE...



HA HA HA, PARE DE TREMER. EU ESTAVA APENAS BRINCANDO.

AH BOM... 1660 É BOM.

EU VOU PARA KUSH PARA NEGOCIAR COM OS REIS NEGROS. EU TROCO CONTAS, SEDA, AÇÚCAR E ESPADAS POR MARFIM, MINÉRIO DE COBRE, ESCRAVOS E PÉROLAS.



TUDO O QUE TENHO PARA VENDER É A MINHA LÂMINA... PELO MAIOR LANCE!

PAGUE-ME E VOCÊ PODE CONTAR COM MINHA PROTEÇÃO.



ESTÁ BEM, NÓS NEGOCIAREMOS OS TERMOS MAIS TARDE. MAS ANTES ME DIGA COMO VOCÊ VIO PARAR NO MEU DECK.

EU PAGUEI UMA QUANTIDADE CONSIDERÁVEL DE TEMPO ENTRE VOCÊS, PESSOAS CIVILIZADAS. NO ENTANTO, SUAS MANEIRAS AINDA SÃO PERFEITAMENTE ESTRANHAS PARA MIM...



QUANDO CHEGAMOS A COSTA DE SHEM,
DESCOBI VASTOS PRADOS COM TORRES
BRANCAS À DISTÂNCIA.

PERTO DA COSTA, CAVALEIROS COM NARIZES
CURVOS E BARBAS ENCARACOLADAS COM
REFLEXOS AZUIS ESCUROS ESTAVAM EMPOL-
LEIRADOS EM SUAS MONTARIAS, OLHANDO
PARA O NAVIO COM DESCONFIANÇA.

MESTRE TITO DECIDIU EVITAR A GRANDE BAÍA
QUE ESTAVA CERCADA PELAS PAREDES ESCU-
RAS DAS FORTALEZAS DE KHEMI, ONDE AS
ÁGUAS TURBULENTAS DO RIO STYX SE
ENCONTRAVAM COM O OCEANO.

OS NAVIOS NÃO SIMPLEMENTE ATRACAVAM NESTE PORTO
SEM SEREM CONVIDADOS. EU TINHA OUVIDO FALAR QUE OS
FEITICEIROS DE PELE ESCURA LANÇAVAM FEITIÇOS HORRÍVEIS,
ENVOLTOS EM FUMAÇA SACRIFICIAL QUE SUBIA ETERNAMENTE
DE ALTARES MANCHADOS DE SANGUE SOBRE OS QUAIS
MULHERES NUAS GRITAVAM.

DIZIA-SE QUE SET, A ANTIGA SERPENTE,
ARQUI-DEMONO DOS HEBRÍANOS, E DEUS DOS
STÍGIOS, MANTINHA SUAS PRESAS BRILHANTES
ENTRE SEUS ADORADORES.



POUCO TEMPO DEPOIS APARECEU UMA GÔNDOLA COM A PROA EM FORMA DE SER-
PENTE, DA QUAL MULHERES NUAS DE PELE ESCURA, GRANDES FLORES VERMELHAS EM
SEUS CABELOS, NOS SEDUZIRAM, FAZENDO POSES LASCIVAS ACOMPANHADAS EM
GESTOS INDECENTES. NÓS APENAS ASSISTÍMOS. JUNTAR-SE A ELAS TERIA SIDO
COMO ASSINAR NOSSA SENTENÇA DE MORTE.

AGORA NÃO HAVIA MAIS DIAS CLAROS SUBINDO AO LONGO
DA COSTA. CRUZAMOS AS FRONTEIRAS DO SUL DA STYGIA
E NAVEGAMOS AO LONGO DAS COSTAS DE KUSH.

SEMPRE PARA O SUL...

MESTRE TITO PROCUROU AS ALDEIAS COM AS
ALTAS PALIÇADAS DAS TRIBOS NEGRAS, MAS
ELE SÓ DISTINGUIA AS RUÍNAS FUMEGANTES...

VEJA! A ESTI-
BORDO!

UM BANHO DE SANGUE NA COSTA
NEGRA.

EU COSTUMAVA FAZER
BONS NEGÓCIOS AQUI.

ISSO É TRABAL-
HO DE PIRATAS.

ESTOU TÃO ENTEDIADO
QUE QUASE DESEJO QUE
PUDESSEMOS CRUZAR O
CAMINHO DELES...

O TIGRESSA!

ESTE É O FIM
PARA NÓS!

NÃO TENHA MEDO, ESTOU AQUI.
EU JÁ TE SALVEI DE DOIS
ATAQUES, NÃO FOI?

SIM, MAS ISSO É DIFERENTE.
ESSE É O NAVIO DE BELIT.

ELA É CHAMADA DE "A RAINHA
DA COSTA NEGRA".

A DIABA MAIS FEROZ QUE JÁ
NAVEGOU PELOS MARES. ELA É
UMA SHEMITE, QUE LÍDERA
PIRATAS NEGRAS.

ELES ESTÃO ATRÁS DE MERCADO-
RIAS E JÁ ENVIARAM MAIS DE UM
NAVIO MERCANTE PARA O FUNDO!

E A MENOS QUE EU TENHA INTERPRETADO
ERRADO OS SINAIS, FORAM SEUS AÇOU-
GUEIROS QUE DESTRUÍRAM ESSA ALDEIA
PERTO DA BAÍA.

VAMOS DAR MEIA
VOLTA!

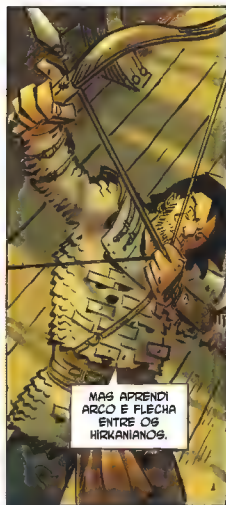
PARA A BOCA
DESSE RIO!

ME DE UM
ARCO!

SE CONSEGUÍRMOS ENTRAR ANTES
QUE NOS ALCANÇEM, TEMOS A CHANCE
DE ESCAPAR COM NOSSAS VIDAS!



ISSO NÃO É O QUE
EU CHAMO DE ARMA
MASCULINA.



MAS APRENDI
ARCO E FLECHA
ENTRE OS
HIRKANIANS.



E ATÉ QUE
TEM UM LADO
PRÁTICO.



ELES AINDA
ESTÃO UM
POUCO LONGE
DEMAIS...



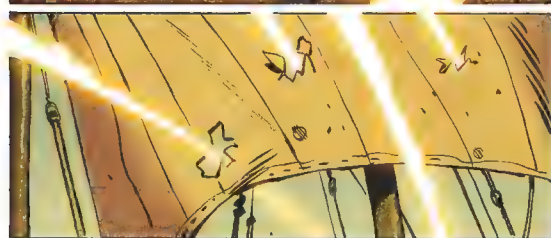
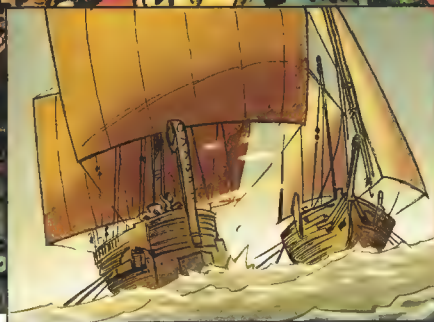
...MAS NÃO DEMORARÁ MUITO ATÉ QUE ESTEJAM
DENTRO DO ALCANCE DE TIRO.



PARA O
MELHOR...



...OU PARA A MORTE.



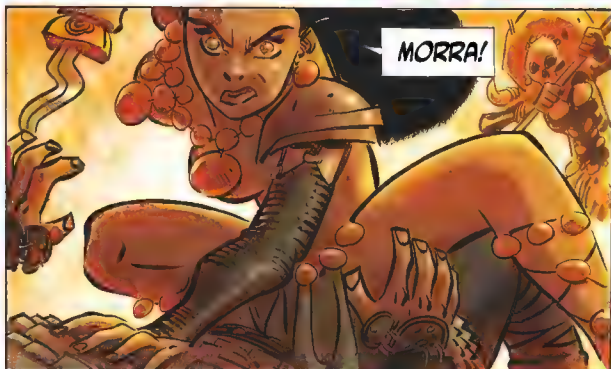




RHAA!



HMPF!



MORRA!

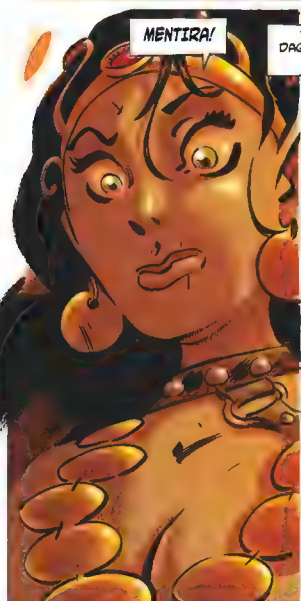


EU NUNCA TERIA
OUSADO IMAGINAR
UMA MORTE MAIS
BELA...

POR IGHTAR, ESTA É
A PRIMEIRA VEZ QUE
CONHEÇO ALGUÉM
COMO VOCÊ!

DE ONDE VOCÊ
VEIO?

ARGOS.



MENTIRA!

VOCÊ NÃO É UM
DAQUELES HIBORIANOS
MACILENTOS!

VOCÊ É TÃO FERÓZ E
DURO QUANTO UM LOBO
CINZENTO.

ESSES OLHOS
NUNCA FORAM OFUSCA-
DOS PELO BRILHO
DA CIDADE.



ESSES MÚSCULOS
NUNCA FORAM ENFRA-
QUECIDOS POR UMA
VIDA DENTRO DE PALÁ-
CIOS DE MÁRMORE.



EU SOU CIMÉRIO.

MEU NOME É
CONAN.

NOSSOS ATAQUES NUNCA ME
LEVARAM TÃO LONGE DE GHEM.

PARA MIM, O NORTE É UM REINO MISTE-
RIOSO, QUASE MÍTICO, HABITADO POR
GIGANTES FERÓZES DE OLHOS AZUIS QUE
SÓ DEIXAM SUAS FORTALEZAS DE GELO
PARA QUEIMAR, MATAR E PILHAR.

EU NÃO POSSO DIZER A DIFERENÇA
ENTRE UM REGIO, UM VANIR OU UM CIMÉRIO.

OS DOIS PRIMEIROS NÃO
VALEM NADA, ACREDITE
EM MIM...

EU SOU RAINHA PELO
FOGO, AÇO E MATANÇA...

SEJA MEU REI.

ESTÁ BEM,
NAVEGAREI COM VOCÊ!

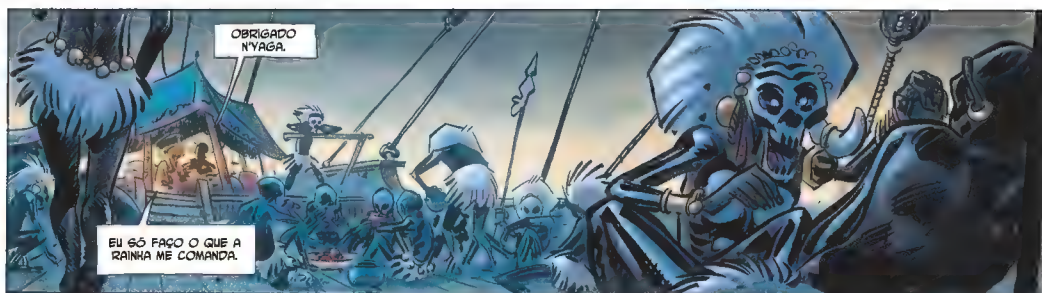
VOCÊ NÃO VAI SE ARREPENDER.

EU SOU BELIT, A RAINHA
DA COSTA NEGRA.

OH, TIGRE DO NORTE, VOCÊ É
TÃO FRIO QUANTO AS MONTANHAS
COBERTAS DE NEVE QUE VIRAM
VOCÊ NASCER.

ACOMPANHA-ME ATÉ OS
CONFINS DA TERRA, ATÉ O
FIM DOS MARES!

TENHO CERTEZA
QUE NÃO VOU.



OBRIGADO
N'YAGA.

EU SÓ FAÇO O QUE A
RAINHA ME COMANDA.



COMO UMA MULHER
BRANCA SE TORNOU SEU
CAPITÃO?



VOCÊ PODE PER-
GUNTAR DIRETAMEN-
TE A ELA...

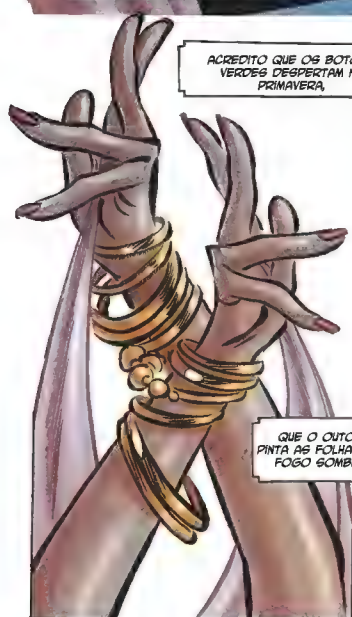


ELA ESTÁ
DE VOLTA.



LOBOS DO MAR AZUL, É HORA DE VOCÊS ASSISTIREM A MINHA DANÇA.

A DANÇA DO AMOR DE BELIT, CUJOS ANCESTRAIS ERAM REIS DE ASKALON!



ACREDITO QUE OS BOTÕES
VERDES DESPERTAM NA
PRIMAVERA.



QUE O OUTONO
PINTA AS FOLHAS COM
FOGO SOMBRIO;



ACREDITO
QUE MANTENHO
MEU CORAÇÃO
INVOLADO,

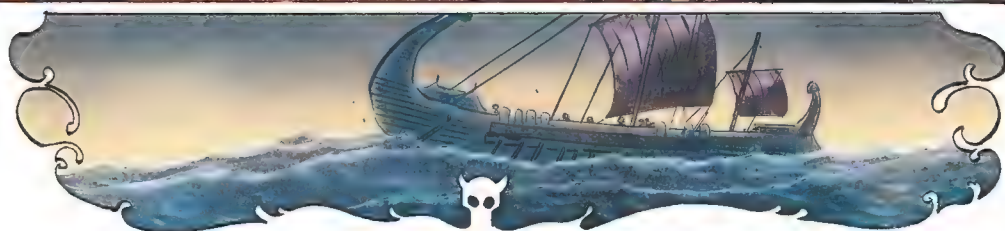
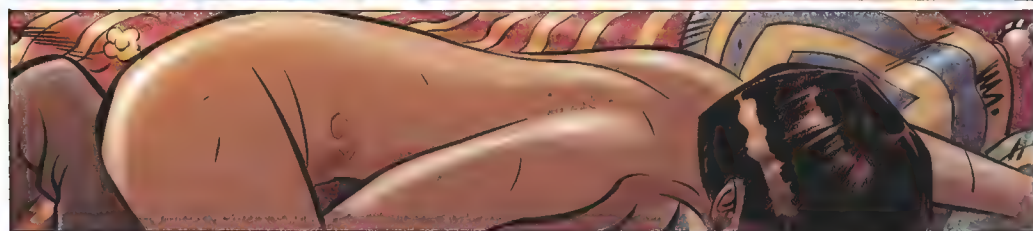
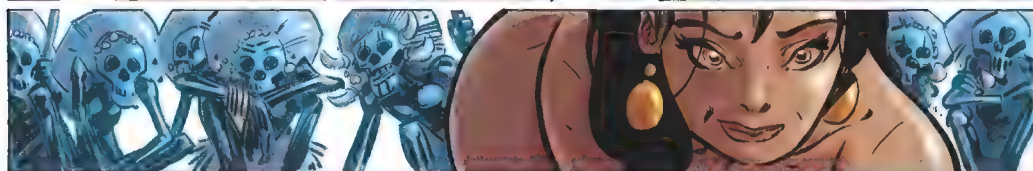
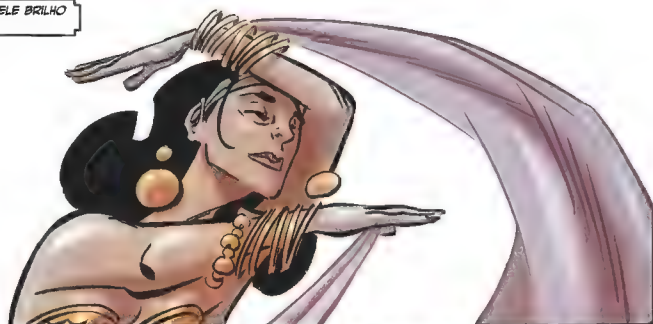
PARA ESBANJAR EM UM HOMEM MEU
DESEJO ARDENTE.

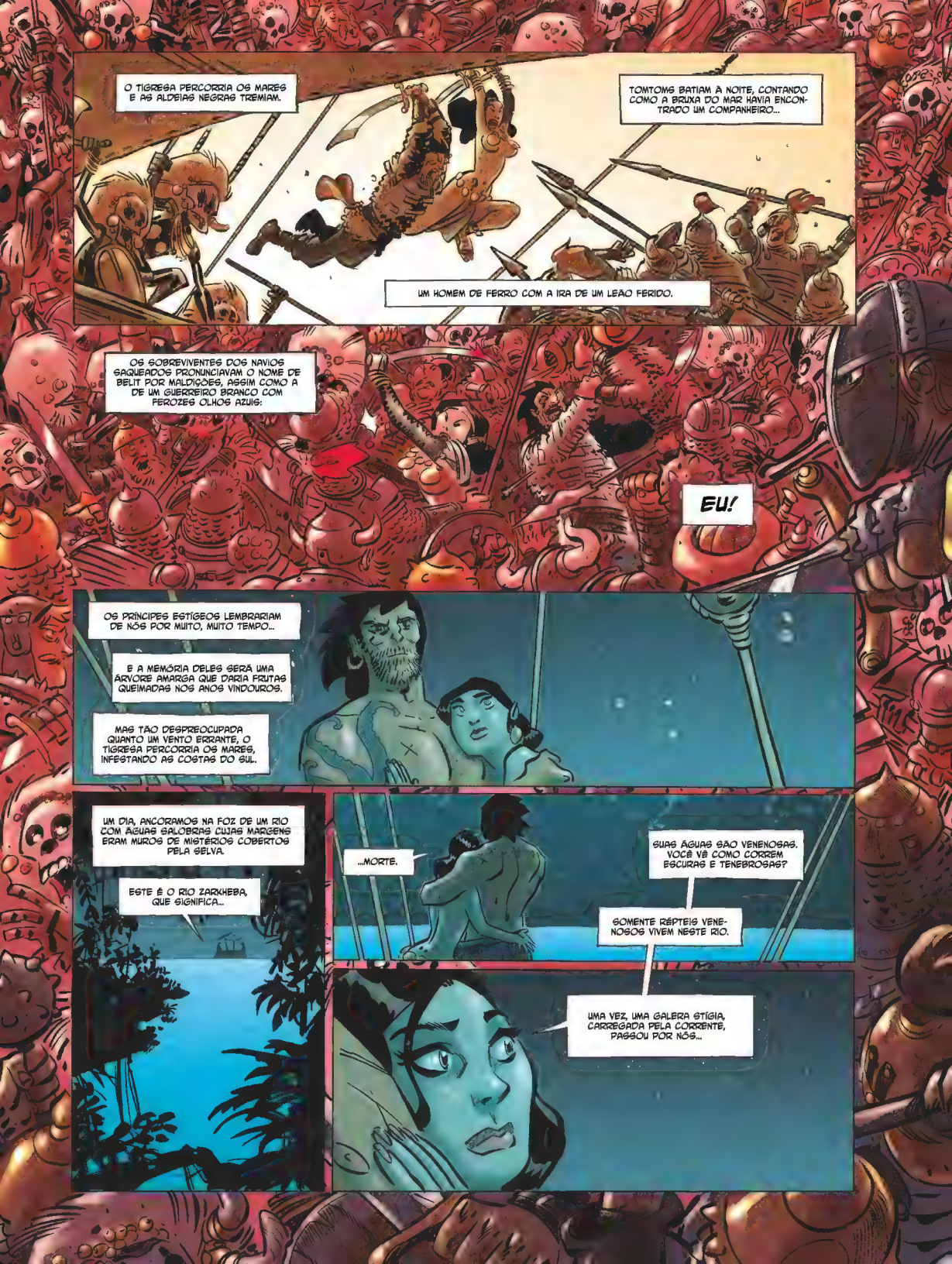
NESSE CIDADELA MORTA DE RUÍNAS DE PEDRA.

SEUS OLHOS ESTAVAM FIXOS POR AQUELE BRILHO
PROFANO.

E UMA CURIOSA LOUCURA ME PEGOU PELA
GARGANTA,

COMO UM RIVAL PRESO ENTRE DUAS AMANTES.





O TIGRESSA PERCORRIA OS MARES
E AS ALDEIAS NEGRAS TREMIAM.

TOMTOMS BATIAM À NOITE, CONTANDO
COMO A BRUXA DO MAR HAVIA ENCON-
TRADO UM COMPANHEIRO...

UM HOMEM DE FERRO COM A IRA DE UM LEÃO FERIDO.

OS SOBREVIVENTES DOS NAVIOS
SAQUEADOS PRONUNCIAVAM O NOME DE
BELIT POR MALDIÇÕES, ASSIM COMO A
DE UM GUERREIRO BRANCO COM
FEROZES OLHOS AZUIS:

EU!

OS PRÍNCIPES ESTIGEOS LEMBRARIAM
DE NÓS POR MUITO, MUITO TEMPO...

E A MEMÓRIA DELES SERÁ UMA
ÁRVORE AMARGA QUE DARIA FRUTAS
QUEIMADAS NOS ANOS VINDOUROS.

MAS TÃO DESPREOCUPADA
QUANTO UM VENTO ERRANTE, O
TIGRESSA PERCORRIA OS MARES,
INFESTANDO AS COSTAS DO SUL.

UM DIA, ANCORAMOS NA FOZ DE UM RIO
COM ÁGUAS BALOBRAS CUJAS MARGENS
ERAM MUROS DE MISTÉRIOS COBERTOS
PELA SELVA.

ESTE É O RIO ZAKHEBA,
QUE SIGNIFICA...

...MORTE.

SUAS ÁGUAS SÃO VENENOSAS.
VOCÊS VÊ COMO CORREM
ESCURAS E TENEBRASAS?

SOMENTE RÉPTEIS VENE-
NOSOS VIVEM NESTE RIO.

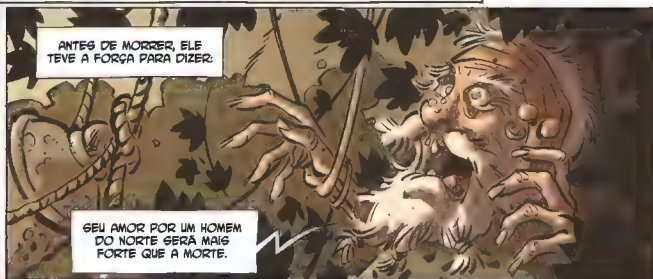
UMA VEZ, UMA GALERA STIGIA,
CARREGADA PELA CORRENTE,
PASSOU POR NÓS...

SEU DECK ESTAVA COBERTO DE SANGUE. UM ÚNICO HOMEM FOI DEIXADO A BORDO, ENREDADO EM VINHAS DE LÓTUS NEGRAS.



ELE ESTAVA
DELIRANDO.

O CHEIRO DAS FLORES
AMALDIÇORADAS O DEIXARA
LOUCO.



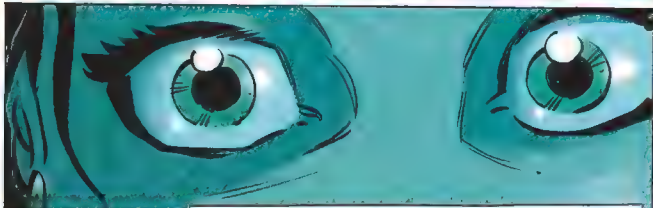
ANTES DE MORRER, ELE
TEVE A FORÇA PARA DIZER:

SEU AMOR POR UM HOMEM
DO NORTE SERÁ MAIS
FORTE QUE A MORTE.



VEJA, NÃO FOI COINCIDÊNCIA.

EU JÁ ESPERAVA
POR VOCÊ.



MEU AMOR, EU ACHO QUE HÁ UMA CIDADE EM ALGUM LUGAR DESTA RIO.



EU OUVI ALGUNS OUSADOS MARINHEIROS, QUE SUBIRAM PARTE DO
RIO, FALAREM DE ENORMES TORRES E MURALHAS VISLUMBRADOS
A DISTÂNCIA.

MAS NÓS, JUNTOS, SOMOS INVENCÍVEIS.
CONAN, VAMOS ENCONTRAR ESTA CIDADE...

E SAQUEA-LA!



ABAIXEM
AS VELAS.

O VENTO SERÁ NOSSO PRIMEIRO
INIMIGO EM UM RIO TÃO ESTREITO.



AOS NOS-
SOS REMOS,
HOMENS!



CONAN, VOCÊ
NÃO TEM QUE...

ISSO É EXATAMENTE
O QUE EU FAÇO, BELIT.



VOCÊ É A MENTE QUE CONCEBE
NOSSOS ATAQUES, E EU OS BRAÇOS
QUE EXECUTAM SUAS IDEIAS.

GUIE-NOS!

ESTAMOS CERCADOS DE MISTÉRIO E TERROR, CONAN, E DESLIZAMOS PARA O REINO DO HORROR E DA MORTE.

ESTÁ COM MEDO?

NUNCA.

NEM EU. EU NUNCA SENTI ESSE SENTIMENTO.

EU OLHO PARA AS PRESAS NUAS DA MORTE COM MUITA FREQUÊNCIA.

MEU AMOR, VOCÊ TEME OS DEUSES?

EU NÃO PISARIA NA SOMBRA DELES COM O MEU PÉ.

ALGUNS DEUSES TÊM O PODER DE NOS FAZER SENTIR UMA DOR TERRÍVEL, E OUTROS VÊM EM NOSSO AUXÍLIO.

PELO MENOS É ISSO QUE OS SACERDOTES DIZEM.

MITRA, O DEUS DOS HIBORANOS, DEVE SER MUITO PODEROSO, PORQUE SEUS ADORADORES CONSTRUÍRAM SUAS CIDADES EM TODO O MUNDO. MAS ATÉ ELES TEMEM GET.

BEL, O DEUS DOS LADROES, É UM DEUS BENEVOLENTE.

QUANDO EU ERA UM LADRAO EM ZAMORA, EU APRENDI A CONHECÊ-LO.

E QUANTO AOS SEUS PRÓPRIOS DEUSES?

EU NUNCA OUVI VOCÊ REZAR PARA ELES.

SEU LÍDER É CROM. ELE MORRERÁ EM UMA GRANDE MONTANHIA, E PARA QUE EU IRÁ INVOCÁ-LO?

ELE NÃO SE IMPORTA SE OS HOMENS VIVEM OU MORREM.

É MELHOR FICAR QUIETO E NÃO ATRAIR SUA ATENÇÃO, PORQUE ELE ENVIARIA MALDIÇÕES, E NÃO BOA SORTE!

ELE É CRUEL E SEM AMOR, MAS AO NASCER ELE INSPIRA O PODER DE LUTAR E MATAR NA ALMA DE TODO HOMEM, O QUE MAIS OS HOMENS DEVEM PEDIR A SEUS DEUSES?

E OS MUNDOS ALÉM DO RIO DA MORTE?

NAS CRENÇAS DO MEU POVO, NÃO HÁ ESPERANÇA... NEM AQUI, NEM DEPOIS.

NESTE MUNDO, OS HOMENS LUTAM E SOFREM EM VÃO, ENCONTRANDO PRAZER APENAS NA ARDENTE LOUCURA DA BATALHA; UMA VEZ MORTOS, SUAS ALMAS ENTRAM EM UM REINO CINZENTO, NUBLADO E GELADO, ONDE VAGAM SEM ALEGRIA PELA ETERNIDADE.

A VIDA, POR PIOR QUE SEJA, É MELHOR QUE TAL DESTINO, NÃO QUE VOCÊ ACREDITA, CONAN?

EU CONHECI MUITOS DEUSES, BELIT. AQUELE QUE NEGA SUA EXISTÊNCIA É TÃO CEGO QUANTO AQUELE QUE CONFIA DEMAIS NELES.

NÃO ESTOU TENTANDO DESCOBRIR O QUE ESTÁ ALÉM DA MORTE. TALVEZ SEJA A SEGURANÇA, COMO AFIRMAM OS CÉTICOS NEMEDIANOS, OU O REINO DO GELO E DAS NUVENS DE CROM.

OU AS PLANÍCIES COBERTAS DE NEVE E OS SALÕES ABOCADADOS DO VALHALLA DOS POVOS DO NORTE.

EU NÃO SEI E NÃO ME IMPORTO. É O SUFICIENTE PARA MIM VIVER A MINHA VIDA AO MÁXIMO, DESDE QUE EU POSSA SABOREAR O SUCO SUCULENTO DE CARNES VERMELHAS E DOS VINHOS DOÇES NOS MEUS LÁBIOS...

...ENQUANTO EU PUDE DESFRUTAR DO ARDENTE ABRACO DOS BRAÇOS COM A BRANCURA DO ALABASTRO E A LOUCA EXULTAÇÃO DA BATALHA QUANDO AS LAMINAS AZUIS PEGAM FOGO E SE TORNAM ESCARLATES, FICO CONTENTE!

DEIXO PARA OS ESTUDIOSOS, SACERDOTES E FILÓSOFOS REFLETIR SOBRE AS QUESTÕES DA REALIDADE E ILUSÃO. EU SEI APENAS UMA COISA...

SE A VIDA É UMA QUIMERA, ENTÃO EU TAMBÉM SOU UMA; PORTANTO, A ILUSÃO É REAL PARA MIM.

EU VIVO, EU QUEIMO COM O ARDOR DE VIVER, AMO, MATO, E ISSO É SUFICIENTE PARA O MEU PRAZER.

EXISTE VIDA ALÉM DA MORTE, EU SEI E EU TAMBÉM SEI 1960, CONAN DA CIMERIA...

MEU AMOR É MAIS FORTE DO QUE QUALQUER MORTE!

EU TERIA DEITADO EM SEUS BRÇOS, OFGANDO COM A VIOLÊNCIA DO NOSSO AMOR.

EXISTE VIDA ALÉM DA MORTE, EU SEI E EU TAMBÉM SEI 1960, CONAN DA CIMERIA...

MEU AMOR É MAIS FORTE DO QUE QUALQUER MORTE!

EU TERIA DEITADO EM SEUS BRÇOS, OFGANDO COM A VIOLÊNCIA DO NOSSO AMOR.



EXISTE VIDA ALÉM DA MORTE, EU SEI E EU TAMBÉM SEI 1960, CONAN DA CINEIRA...

MEU AMOR É MAIS FORTE DO QUE QUALQUER MORTE!

EU TERIA DEITADO EM SEUS BRÇOS, OFGANDO COM A VIOLÊNCIA DO NOSSO AMOR.

MEU CORAÇÃO ESTÁ PRESO AO SEU CORAÇÃO, MINHA ALMA FAZ PARTE DA SUA ALMA!

VOCE ME TOMOU, ME DOMINOU E ME CONQUISTOU, LEVANDO MINHA ALMA AOS SEUS LÁBIOS COM A FÚRIA DE SEUS BENJOS QUE ME MACHUCARAM.

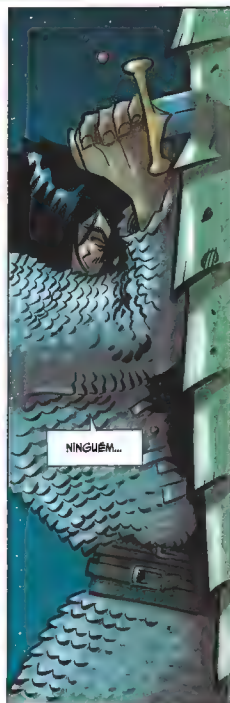
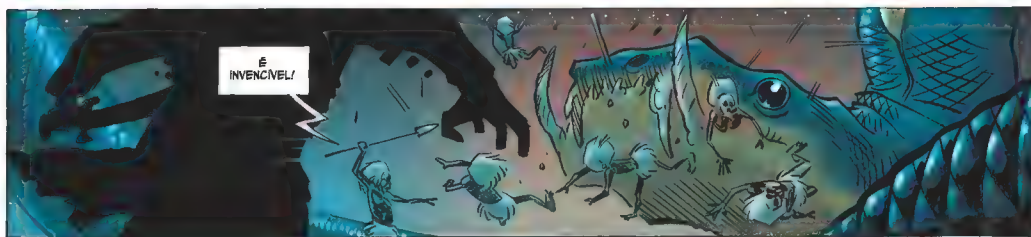
MEU CORAÇÃO ESTÁ PRESO AO SEU CORAÇÃO, MINHA ALMA FAZ PARTE DA SUA ALMA!

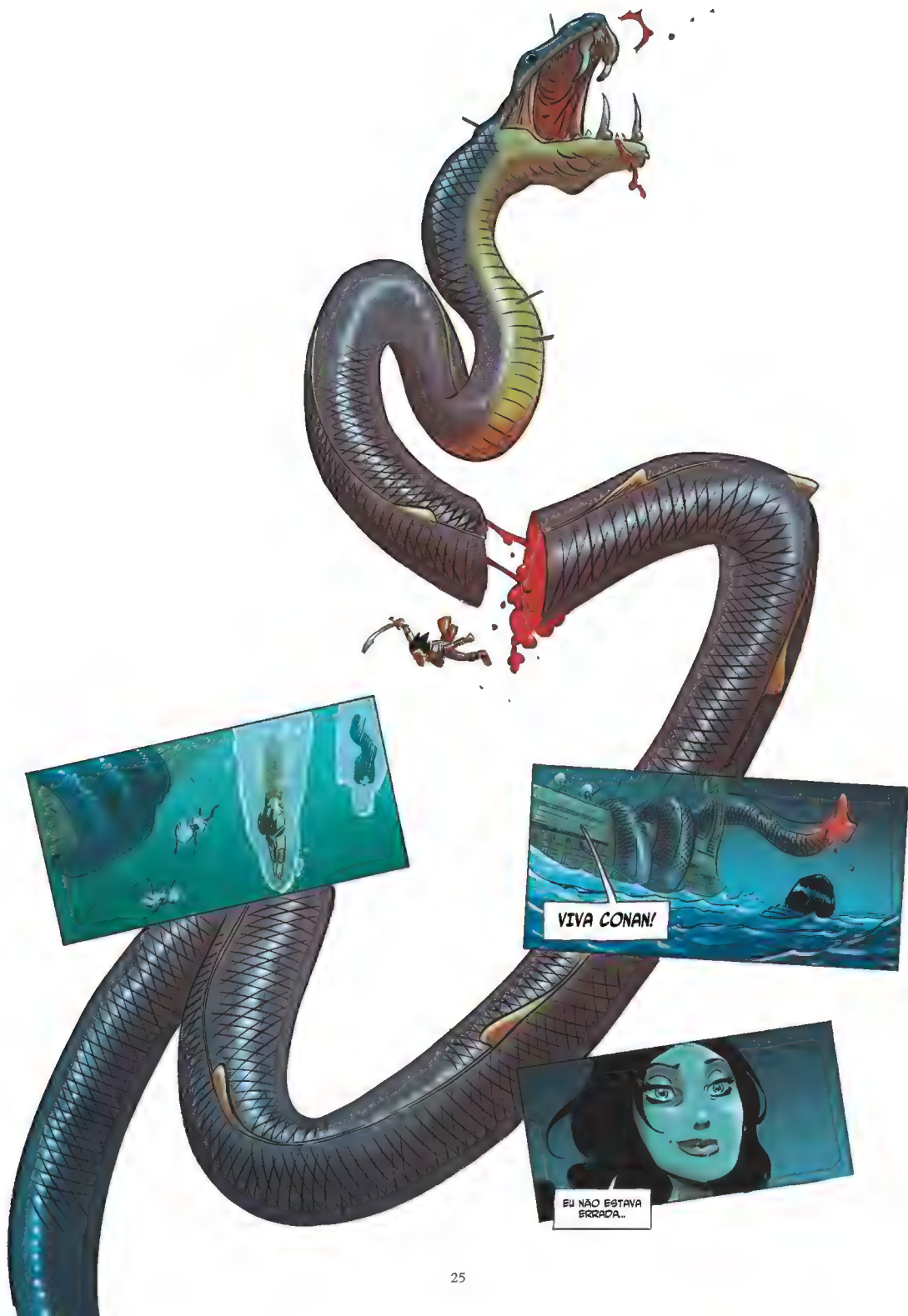
VOCE ME TOMOU, ME DOMINOU E ME CONQUISTOU, LEVANDO MINHA ALMA AOS SEUS LÁBIOS COM A FÚRIA DE SEUS BENJOS QUE ME MACHUCARAM.

AINDA SE A MORTE TIVESSE ME LEVADO E
VOCÊ ESTIVESSE LUTANDO POR SUA VIDA,
EU VOLTARIA DO ABISMO PARA AJUDA-LO.

SIM, AINDA SE MEU ESPÍRITO FLUTUAR
ENTRE VÊUS ROXOS NOS MARES CRISTA-
LINOS DO PARAÍSO OU SE CONTORCER
NAS CHAMAS ARDENTES DO INFERNO!

AAAAAAIIIIIIIEEEEE!







CROM!

CONTINUA...

QUEEN OF THE BLACK COAST

By Robert E. Howard
May 1934 *Weird Tales*

1. CONAN JOINS THE PIRATES

*Believe green buds awaken in the spring,
That autumn paints the leaves with somber fire;
Believe I held my heart inviolate
To lavish on one man my hot desire.
The Song of Belit*

Hoofs drummed down the street that sloped to the wharfs. The folk that yelled and scattered had only a fleeting glimpse of a mailed figure on a black stallion, a wide scarlet cloak flowing out on the wind. Far up the street came the shout and clatter of pursuit, but the horseman did not look back. He swept out onto the wharfs and jerked the plunging stallion back on its haunches at the very lip of the pier. Seamen gaped up at him, as they stood to the sweep and striped sail of a high-prowed, broadwaisted galley. The master, sturdy and black-bearded, stood in the bows, easing her away from the piles with a boat-hook. He yelled angrily as the horseman sprang from the saddle and with a long leap landed squarely on the mid-deck.

"Who invited you aboard?"

"Get under way!" roared the intruder with a fierce gesture that scattered red drops from his broadsword.

"But we're bound for the coasts of Kush!" expostulated the master.

"Then I'm for Kush! Push off, I tell you!" The other cast a quick glance up the street, along which a squad of horsemen were galloping; far behind them toiled a group of archers, crossbows on their shoulders.

"Can you pay for your passage?" demanded the master.

"I pay my way with steel!" roared the man in armor, brandishing the great sword that glittered blue in the sun. "By Crom, yin, if you don't get under way, I'll drench this galley in the 'blood of its crew!'"

The shipmaster was a good judge of men. One glance at the irk scarred face of the swordsman, hardened with passion, and he shouted a quick order, thrusting strongly against the piles. The galley wallowed out into clear water, the oars began to clack rhythmically; then a puff of wind filled the shimmering sail, the light ship heeled to the gust, then took her course like a swan, gathering headway as she skimmed along.

On the wharfs the riders were shaking their swords and shouting threats and commands that the ship put about, and yelling for the bowmen to hasten before the craft was out of arbalest range.

"Let them rave," grinned the swordsman hardily. "Do you keep her on her course, master steersman."

The master descended from the small deck between the bows, made his way between the rows of oarsmen, and mounted the mid-deck. The stranger stood there with his back to the mast, eyes narrowed alertly, sword ready. The shipman eyed him steadily, careful not to make any move toward the long knife in his belt. He saw a tall powerfully built figure in a black scalemail hauberk, burnished greaves and a blue-steel helmet from which jutted bull's horns highly polished. From the mailed shoulders fell the scarlet cloak, blowing in the sea-wind. A broad shagreen belt with a golden buckle held the scabbard of the broadsword he bore. Under the horned helmet a square-cut black mane contrasted with smoldering grey eyes.

"If we must travel together," said the master, "we may as well be at peace with each other. My name is Tito, licensed master-shipman of the ports of Argos. I am bound for Kush, to trade beads and silks and sugar and brass-hilted swords to the black kings for ivory, copra, copper ore, slaves and pearls."

The swordsman glanced back at the rapidly receding docks, where the figures still gesticulated helplessly, evidently having trouble in finding a boat swift enough to overhaul the fast-sailing galley.

"I am Conan, a Cimmerian," he answered. "I came into Argos seeking employment, but with no wars forward, there was

nothing to which I might turn my hand."

"Why do the guardsman pursue you?" asked Tito. "Not that it's any of my business, but I thought perhaps—"

"I've nothing to conceal," replied the Cimmerian. "By Crom, though I've spent considerable time among you civilized peoples, your ways are still beyond my comprehension."

"Well, last night in a tavern, a captain in the king's guard offered violence to the sweetheart of a young soldier, who naturally ran him through. But it seems there is some cursed law against killing guardsmen, and the boy and his girl fled away. It was bruited about that I was seen with them, and so today I was haled into court, and a judge asked me where the lad had gone. I replied that since he was a friend of mine, I could not betray him. Then the court waxed wrath, and the judge talked a great deal about my duty to the state, and society, and other things I did not understand, and bade me tell where my friend had flown. By this time I was becoming wrathful myself, for I had explained my position."

"But I choked my ire and held my peace, and the judge squalled that I had shown contempt for the court, and that I should be hurled into a dungeon to rot until I betrayed my friend. So then, seeing they were all mad, I drew my sword and cleft the judge's skull; then I cut my way out of the court, and seeing the high constable's stallion tied near by, I rode for the wharfs, where I thought to find a ship bound for foreign parts."

"Well," said Tito hardily, "the courts have fleeced me too often in suits with rich merchants for me to owe them any love. I'll have questions to answer if I ever anchor in that port again, but I can prove I acted under compulsion. You may as well put up your sword. We're peaceable sailors, and have nothing against you. Besides, it's as well to have a fighting-man like yourself on board. Come up to the poop-deck and we'll have a tankard of ale."

"Good enough," readily responded the Cimmerian, sheathing his sword.

The Argus was a small sturdy ship, typical of those trading-craft which ply between the ports of Zingara and Argos and the southern coasts, hugging the shoreline and seldom venturing far into the open ocean. It was high of stern, with a tall curving prow; broad in the waist, sloping beautifully to stem and stern. It was guided by the long sweep from the poop, and propulsion was furnished mainly by the broad striped silk sail, aided by a jibsail. The oars were for use in tacking out of creeks and bays, and during calms. There were ten to the side, five fore and five aft of the small mid-deck. The most precious part of the cargo was lashed under this deck, and under the fore-deck. The men slept on deck or between the rowers' benches, protected in bad weather by canopies. With twenty men at the oars, three at the sweep, and the shipmaster, the crew was complete.

So the Argus pushed steadily southward, with consistently fair weather. The sun beat down from day to day with fiercer heat, and the canopies were run up—striped silken cloths that matched the shimmering sail and the shining goldwork on the prow and along the gunwales.

They sighted the coast of Shem—long rolling meadowlands with the white crowns of the towers of cities in the distance, and horsemen with blue-black beards and hooked noses, who sat their steeds along the shore and eyed the galley with suspicion. She did not put in; there was scant profit in trade with the sons of Shem.

Nor did master Tito pull into the broad bay where the Styx river emptied its gigantic flood into the ocean, and the massive black castles of Khemi loomed over the blue waters. Ships did not put unasked into this port, where dusky sorcerers wove awful spells in the murk of sacrificial smoke mounting eternally from blood-stained altars where naked women screamed, and where Set, the Old Serpent, arch-demon of the Hyborians but god of the Stygians, was said to writhe his shining coils among his worshippers.

Master Tito gave that dreamy glass-floored bay a wide berth, even when a serpent-prowed gondola shot from behind a castellated point of land, and naked dusky women, with great red

blossoms in their hair, stood and called to his sailors, and posed and postured brazenly.

Now no more shining towers rose inland. They had passed the southern borders of Stygia and were cruising along the coasts of Kush. The sea and the ways of the sea were never-ending mysteries to Conan, whose homeland was among the high hills of the northern uplands. The wanderer was no less of interest to the sturdy seamen, few of whom had ever seen one of his race.

They were characteristic Argosean sailors, short and stockily built. Conan towered above them, and no two of them could match his strength. They were hardy and robust, but his was the endurance and vitality of a wolf, his thews steeled and his nerves whetted by the hardness of his life in the world's wastelands. He was quick to laugh, quick and terrible in his wrath. He was a valiant trencherman, and strong drink was a passion and a weakness with him. Naive as a child in many ways, unfamiliar with the sophistry of civilization, he was naturally intelligent, jealous of his rights, and dangerous as a hungry tiger. Young in years, he was hardened in warfare and wandering, and his sojourns in many lands were evident in his apparel. His horned helmet was such as was worn by the golden-haired AEsir of Nordheim; his hauberk and greaves were of the finest workmanship of Koth; the fine ring-mail which sheathed his arms and legs was of Nemed; the blade at his girdle was a great Aquilonian broadsword; and his gorgeous scarlet cloak could have been spun nowhere but in Ophir.

So they beat southward, and master Tito began to look for the high-walled villages of the black people. But they found only smoking ruins on the shore of a bay, littered with naked black bodies. Tito swore.

"I had good trade here, aforesaid. This is the work of pirates."

"And if we meet them?" Conan loosened his great blade in its scabbard.

"Mine is no warship. We run, not fight. Yet if it came to a pinch, we have beaten off reavers before, and might do it again; unless it were Belit's Tigress."

"Who is Belit?"

"The wildest she-devil unhanged. Unless I read the signs awrong, it was her butchers who destroyed that village on the bay. May I some day see her dangling from the yard-arm!"

She is called the queen of the black coast. She is a Shemite woman, who leads black raiders. They harry the shipping and have sent many a good tradesman to the bottom."

From under the poop-deck Tito brought out quilted jerkins, steel caps, bows and arrows.

"Little use to resist if we're run down," he grunted. "But it rasps the soul to give up life without a struggle."

It was just at sunrise when the lookout shouted a warning. Around the long point of an island off the starboard bow glided a long lethal shape, a slender serpentine galley, with a raised deck that ran from stem to stern. Forty oars on each side drove her swiftly through the water, and the low rail swarmed with naked blacks that chanted and clashed spears on oval shields. From the masthead floated a long crimson pennon.

"Belit!" yelled Tito, paling. "Yare! Put her about! Into that creek-mouth! If we can beach her before they run us down, we have a chance to escape with our lives!"

So, veering sharply, the Argus ran for the line of surf that boomed along the palm-fringed shore, Tito striding back and forth, exhorting the panting rowers to greater efforts. The master's black beard bristled, his eyes glared.

"Give me a bow," requested Conan. "It's not my idea of a manly weapon, but I learned archery among the Hyrkansians, and it will go hard if I can't feather a man or so on yonder deck."

Standing on the poop, he watched the serpent-like ship skimming lightly over the waters, and landsman though he was, it was evident to him that the Argus would never win that race. Already arrows, arching from the pirate's deck, were falling with a hiss into the sea, not twenty paces astern.

"We'd best stand to it," growled the Cimmerian; "else we'll all die with shafts in our backs, and not a blow dealt."

"Bend to it, dogs!" roared Tito with a passionate gesture of

his brawny fist. The bearded rowers grunted, heaved at the oars, while their muscles coiled and knotted, and sweat started out on their hides. The timbers of the stout little galley creaked and groaned as the men fairly ripped her through the water. The wind had fallen; the sail hung limp. Nearer crept the inexorable raiders, and they were still a good mile from the surf when one of the steersmen fell gagging across a sweep, a long arrow through his neck. Tito sprang to take his place, and Conan, bracing his feet wide on the heaving poop-deck, lifted his bow. He could see the details of the pirate plainly now. The rowers were protected by a line of raised mantelets along the sides, but the warriors dancing on the narrow deck were in full view. These were painted and plumed, and mostly naked, brandishing spears and spotted shields.

On the raised platform in the bows stood a slim figure whose white skin glistened in dazzling contrast to the glossy ebony hides about it. Belit, without a doubt. Conan drew the shaft to his ear—then some whim or qualm stayed his hand and sent the arrow through the body of a tall plumed spearman beside her.

Hand over hand the pirate galley was overhauling the lighter ship. Arrows fell in a rain about the Argus, and men cried out. All the steersmen were down, pincushioned, and Tito was handling the massive sweep alone, gasping black curses, his braced legs knots of straining thews. Then with a sob he sank down, a long shaft quivering in his sturdy heart. The Argus lost headway and rolled in the swell. The men shouted in confusion, and Conan took command in characteristic fashion.

"Up, lads!" he roared, loosing with a vicious twang of cord. "Grab your steel and give these dogs a few knocks before they cut our throats! Useless to bend your backs any more: they'll board us ere we can row another fifty paces!"

In desperation the sailors abandoned their oars and snatched up their weapons. It was valiant, but useless. They had time for one flight of arrows before the pirate was upon them. With no one at the sweep, the Argus rolled broadside, and the steel-baked prow of the raider crashed into her amidships. Grappling-irons crunched into the side. From the lofty gunwales, the black pirates drove down a volley of shafts that tore through the quilted jackets of the doomed sailormen, then sprang down spear in hand to complete the slaughter. On the deck of the pirate lay half a dozen bodies, an earnest of Conan's archery.

The fight on the Argus was short and bloody. The stocky sailors, no match for the tall barbarians, were cut down to a man. Elsewhere the battle had taken a peculiar turn. Conan, on the high-pitched poop, was on a level with the pirate's deck. As the steel prow slashed into the Argus, he braced himself and kept his feet under the shock, casting away his bow. A tall corsair, bounding over the rail, was met in midair by the Cimmerian's great sword, which sheared him cleanly through the torso, so that his body fell one way and his legs another. Then, with a burst of fury that left a heap of mangled corpses along the gunwales, Conan was over the rail and on the deck of the Tigress.

In an instant he was the center of a hurricane of stabbing spears and lashing clubs. But he moved in a blinding blur of steel. Spears bent on his armor or swished empty air, and his sword sang its death-song. The fighting-madness of his race was upon him, and with a red mist of unreasoning fury wavering before his blazing eyes, he cleft skulls, smashed breasts, severed limbs, ripped out entrails, and littered the deck like a shambles with a ghastly harvest of brains and blood.

Invulnerable in his armor, his back against the mast, he heaped mangled corpses at his feet until his enemies gave back panting in rage and fear. Then as they lifted their spears to cast them, and he tensed himself to leap and die in the midst of them, a shrill cry froze the lifted arms. They stood like statues, the black giants poised for the spearcasts, the mailed swordsmen with his dripping blade.

Befit sprang before the blacks, beating down their spears. She turned toward Conan, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing. Fierce fingers of wonder caught at his heart. She was slender, yet formed like a goddess: at once lithe and voluptuous. Her only garment was a broad silken girdle. Her white ivory

limbs and the ivory globes of her breasts drove a beat of fierce passion through the Cimmerian's pulse, even in the panting fury of battle. Her rich black hair, black as a Stygian night, fell in rippling burnished clusters down her supple back. Her dark eyes burned on the Cimmerian.

She was untamed as a desert wind, supple and dangerous as a she-panther. She came close to him, heedless of his great blade, dripping with blood of her warriors. Her supple thigh brushed against it, so close she came to the tall warrior. Her red lips parted as she stared up into his somber menacing eyes.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "By Ishtar, I have never seen your like, though I have ranged the sea from the coasts of Zingara to the fires of the ultimate south. Whence come you?"

"From Argos," he answered shortly, alert for treachery. Let her slim hand move toward the jeweled dagger in her girdle, and a buffet of his open hand would stretch her senseless on the deck. Yet in his heart he did not fear; he had held too many women, civilized or barbaric, in his iron-Chewed arms, not to recognize the light that burned in the eyes of this one.

"You are no soft Hyborian!" she exclaimed. "You are fierce and hard as a gray wolf. Those eyes were never dimmed by city lights; those thighs were never softened by life amid marble walls."

"I am Conan, a Cimmerian," he answered.

To the people of the exotic climes, the north was a mazy half-mythical realm, peopled with ferocious blue-eyed giants who occasionally descended from their icy fastnesses with torch and sword. Their raids had never taken them as far south as Shem, and this daughter of Shem made no distinction between AEsir, Vanir or Cimmerian. With the unerring instinct of the elemental feminine, she knew she had found her lover, and his race meant naught, save as it invested him with the glamor of far lands.

"And I am Belit," she cried, as one might say, "I am queen."

"Look at me, Conan!" She threw wide her arms. "I am Belit, queen of the black coast. Oh, tiger of the North, you are cold as the snowy mountains which bred you. Take me and crush me with your fierce love! Go with me to the ends of the earth and the ends of the sea! I am a queen by fire and steel and slaughter—be thou my king!"

His eyes swept the blood-stained ranks, seeking expressions of wrath or jealousy. He saw none. The fury was gone from the ebon faces. He realized that to these men Belit was more than a woman: a goddess whose will was unquestioned. He glanced at the Argus, wallowing in the crimson sea-wash, heeling far over, her decks awash, held up by the grappling-irons. He glanced at the blue-fringed shore, at the far green hazes of the ocean, at the vibrant figure which stood before him; and his barbaric soul stirred within him. To quest these shining blue realms with that white-skinned young tiger-cat—to love, laugh, wander and pillage—"I'll sail with you," he grunted, shaking the red drops from his blade.

"Ho, N'Yaga!" her voice twanged like a bowstring. "Fetch herbs and dress your master's wounds! The rest of you bring aboard the plunder and cast off."

As Conan sat with his back against the poop-rail, while the old shaman attended to the cuts on his hands and limbs, the cargo of the ill-fated Argus was quickly shifted aboard the Tigress and stored in small cabins below deck. Bodies of the crew and of fallen pirates were cast overboard to the swarming sharks, while wounded blacks were laid in the waist to be bandaged. Then the grappling-irons were cast off, and as the Argus sank silently into the blood-flecked waters, the Tigress moved off southward to the rhythmic clack of the oars.

As they moved out over the glassy blue deep, Belit came to the poop. Her eyes were burning like those of a she-panther in the dark as she tore off her ornaments, her sandals and her silken girdle and cast them at his feet. Rising on tiptoe, arms stretched upward, a quivering line of naked white, she cried to the desperate horde: "Wolves of the blue sea, behold ye now the dance—the mating-dance of Belit, whose fathers were kings of Askalon!"

And she danced, like the spin of a desert whirlwind, like the leaping of a quenchless flame, like the urge of creation and the urge of death. Her white feet spurned the blood-stained deck and dying men forgot death as they gazed frozen at her. Then, as

the white stars glimmered through the blue velvet dusk, making her whirling body a blur of ivory fire, with a wild cry she threw herself at Conan's feet, and the blind flood of the Cimmerian's desire swept all else away as he crushed her panting form against the black plates of his corseleted breast.

2. THE BLACK LOTUS

*In that dead citadel of crumbling stone,
Her eyes were snared by that unholy sheen,
And curious madness took me by the throat,
As of a rival lover thrust between.*

The Song of Belit

The Tigress ranged the sea, and the black villages shuddered. Tomtoms beat in the night, with a tale that the she-devil of the sea had found a mate, an iron man whose wrath was as that of a wounded lion. And survivors of butchered Stygian ships named Belit with curses, and a white warrior with fierce blue eyes; so the Stygian princes remembered this man long and long, and their memory was a bitter tree which bore crimson fruit in the years to come.

But heedless as a vagrant wind, the Tigress cruised the southern coasts, until she anchored at the mouth of a broad sullen river, whose banks were jungle-clouded walls of mystery.

"This is the river Zarkheba, which is Death," said Belit. "Its waters are poisonous. See how dark and murky they run? Only venomous reptiles live in that river. The black people shun it. Once a Stygian galley, fleeing from me, fled up the river and vanished. I anchored in this very spot, and days later, the galley came floating down the dark waters, its decks blood-stained and deserted. Only one man was on board, and he was mad and died gibbering. The cargo was intact, but the crew had vanished into silence and mystery."

"My lover, I believe there is a city somewhere on that river. I have heard tales of giant towers and walls glimpsed afar off by sailors who dared go part-way up the river. We fear nothing: Conan, let us go and sack that city."

Conan agreed. He generally agreed to her plans. Hers was the mind that directed their raids, his the arm that carried out her ideas. It mattered little to him where they sailed or whom they fought, so long as they sailed and fought. He found the life good.

Battle and raid had thinned their crew; only some eighty spear-men remained, scarcely enough to work the long galley. But Belit would not take the time to make the long cruise southward to the island kingdoms where she recruited her buccaneers. She was afire with eagerness for her latest venture; so the Tigress swung into the river mouth, the oarsmen pulling strongly as she breasted the broad current.

They rounded the mysterious bend that shut out the sight of the sea, and sunset found them forging steadily against the sluggish flow, avoiding sandbars where strange reptiles coiled. Not even a crocodile did they see, nor any fourlegged beast or winged bird coming down to the water's edge to drink. On through the blackness that preceded moonrise they drove, between banks that were solid palisades of darkness, whence came mysterious rustlings and stealthy footfalls, and the gleam of grim eyes. And once an inhuman voice was lifted in awful mockery the cry of an ape, Belit said, adding that the souls of evil men were imprisoned in these man-like animals as punishment for past crimes. But Conan doubted, for once, in a gold-barred cage in an Hyrkanian city, he had seen an abysmal sad-eyed beast which men told him was an ape, and there had been about it naught of the demoniac malevolence which vibrated in the shrieking laughter that echoed from the black jungle.

Then the moon rose, a splash of blood, ebony-barred, and the jungle awoke in horrific bedlam to greet it. Roars and howls and yells set the black warriors to trembling, but all this noise, Conan noted, came from farther back in the jungle, as if the beasts no less than men shunned the black waters of Zarkheba.

Rising above the black denseness of the trees and above the waving fronds, the moon silvered the river, and their wake

became a rippling scintillation of phosphorescent bubbles that widened like a shining road of bursting jewels. The oars dipped into the shining water and came up sheathed in frosty silver. The plumes on the warrior's head-piece nodded in the wind, and the gems on sword-hilts and harness sparkled frostily.

The cold light struck icy fire from the jewels in Wit's clustered black locks as she stretched her lithe figure on a leopardskin thrown on the deck. Supported on her elbows, her chin resting on her slim hands, she gazed up into the face of Conan, who lounged beside her, his black mane stirring in the faint breeze. Belit's eyes were dark jewels burning in the moonlight.

"Mystery and terror are about us, Conan, and we glide into the realm of horror and death," she said. "Are you afraid?"

A shrug of his mailed shoulders was his only answer.

"I am not afraid either," she said meditatively. "I was never afraid. I have looked into the naked fangs of Death too often. Conan, do you fear the gods?"

"I would not tread on their shadow," answered the barbarian conservatively. "Some gods are strong to harm, others, to aid; at least so say their priests. Mitra of the Hyborians must be a strong god, because his people have builded their cities over the world. But even the Hyborians fear Set. And Bel, god of thieves, is a good god. When I was a thief in Zamora I learned of him."

"What of your own gods? I have never heard you call on them."

"Their chief is Crom. He dwells on a great mountain. What use to call on him? Little he cares if men live or die. Better to be silent than to call his attention to you; he will send you dooms, not fortune! He is grim and loveless, but at birth he breathes power to strive and slay into a man's soul. What else shall men ask of the gods?"

"But what of the worlds beyond the river of death?" she persisted.

"There is no hope here or hereafter in the cult of my people," answered Conan. "In this world men struggle and suffer vainly, finding pleasure only in the bright madness of battle; dying, their souls enter a gray misty realm of clouds and icy winds, to wander cheerlessly throughout eternity."

Belit shuddered. "Life, bad as it is, is better than such a destiny. What do you believe, Conan?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I have known many gods. He who denies them is as blind as he who trusts them too deeply. I seek not beyond death. It may be the blackness averred by the Nemedian skeptics, or Crom's realm of ice and cloud, or the snowy plains and vaulted halls of the Nordheimer's Valhalla. I know not, nor do I care. Let me live deep while I live; let me know the rich juices of red meat and stinging wine on my palate, the hot embrace of white arms, the mad exultation of battle when the blue blades flame and crimson, and I am content. Let teachers and priests and philosophers brood over questions of reality and illusion. I know this: if life is illusion, then I am no less an illusion, and being thus, the illusion is real to me. I live, I burn with life, I love, I slay, and am content."

"But the gods are real," she said, pursuing her own line of thought. "And above all are the gods of the Shemites—Ishtar and Ashtoreth and Derketo and Adonis. Bel, too, is Shemitish, for he was born in ancient Shumir, long, long ago and went forth laughing, with curled beard and impish wise eyes, to steal the gems of the kings of old times."

"There is life beyond death, I know, and I know this, too, Conan of Cimmeria—" she rose lithely to her knees and caught him in a pantherish embrace—"my love is stronger than any death! I have lain in your arms, panting with the violence of our love; you have held and crushed and conquered me, drawing my soul to your lips with the fierceness of your bruising kisses. My heart is welded to your heart, my soul is part of your soul! Were I still in death and you fighting for life, I would come back from the abyss to aid you—aye, whether my spirit floated with the purple sails on the crystal sea of paradise, or writhed in the molten flames of hell! I am yours, and all the gods and all their eternities shall not sever us!"

A scream rang from the lookout in the bows. Thrusting Belit aside, Conan bounded up, his sword a long silver glitter in the

moonlight, his hair bristling at what he saw. The black warrior dangled above the deck, supported by what seemed a dark pliant tree trunk arching over the rail. Then he realized that it was a gigantic serpent which had writhed its glistening length up the side of the bow and gripped the luckless warrior in its jaws. Its dripping scales shone leprously in the moonlight as it reared its form high above the deck, while the stricken man screamed and writhed like a mouse in the fangs of a python.

Conan rushed into the bows, and swinging his great sword, hewed nearly through the giant trunk, which was thicker than a man's body. Blood drenched the rails as the dying monster swayed far out, still gripping its victim, and sank into the river, coil by coil, lashing the water to bloody foam, in which man and reptile vanished together.

Thereafter Conan kept the lookout watch himself, but no other horror came crawling up from the murky depths, and as dawn whitened over the jungle, he sighted the black fangs of towers jutting up among the trees. He called Belit, who slept on the deck, wrapped in his scarlet cloak; and she sprang to his side, eyes blazing. Her lips were parted to call orders to her warriors to take up bow and spears; then her lovely eyes widened.

It was but the ghost of a city on which they looked when they cleared a jutting jungle-clad point and swung in toward the in-curving shore. Weeds and rank river grass grew between the stones of broken piers and shattered paves that had once been streets and anal spacious plazas and broad courts. From all sides except that toward the river, the jungle crept in, masking fallen columns and crumbling mounds with poisonous green. Here and there buckling towers reeled drunkenly against the morning sky, and broken pillars jutted up among the decaying walls. In the center space a marble pyramid was spired by a slim column, and on its pinnacle sat or squatted something that Conan supposed to be an image until his keen eyes detected life in it.

"It is a great bird," said one of the warriors, standing in the bows. "It is a monster bat," insisted another.

"It is an ape," said Belit.

Just then the creature spread broad wings and flapped off into the jungle.

"A winged ape," said old N'Yaga uneasily. "Better we had cut our throats than come to this place. It is haunted."

Belit mocked at his superstitions and ordered the galley run inshore and tied to the crumbling wharfs. She was the first to spring ashore, closely followed by Conan, and after them trooped the ebon-skinned pirates, white plumes waving in the morning wind, spears ready, eyes rolling dubiously at the surrounding jungle.

Over all brooded a silence as sinister as that of a sleeping serpent. Belit posed picturesquely among the ruins, the vibrant life in her lithe figure contrasting strangely with the desolation and decay about her. The sun flamed up slowly, sullenly, above the jungle, flooding the towers with a dull gold that left shadows lurking beneath the tottering walls. Belit pointed to a slim round tower that reeled on its rotting base. A broad expanse of cracked, grass-grown slabs led up to it, flanked by fallen columns, and before it stood a massive altar. Belit went swiftly along the ancient floor and stood before it.

"This was the temple of the old ones," she said. "Look—you can see the channels for the blood along the sides of the altar, and the rains of ten thousand years have not washed the dark stains from them. The walls have all fallen away, but this stone block defies time and the elements."

"But who were these old ones?" demanded Conan.

She spread her slim hands helplessly. "Not even in legendary is this city mentioned. But look at the handholes at either end of the altar! Priests often conceal their treasures beneath their altars. Four of you lay hold and see if you can lift it."

TO BE CONTINUED...

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ARMAS, VAMOS DAR ALGUNS
GOLPES Nesses CÃES... ANTES
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